

The 'Perdition' affair: a letter

JIM ALLEN is accused of being "vainglorious, boastful" and the campaign against the banning of *Perdition* is described as being "smart" and "disingenuous" ("The *Perdition* Affair" by John O'Mahony, WL6).

Far be it from me to accuse John O'Mahony of these sins, despite setting himself up as some form of expert on the subject matter under discussion. But where O'Mahony is wrong is when he equates freedom of speech for anti-Zionists and socialists with the right of those who disagree with *Perdition* to campaign for its banning. It's like saying that a film on police violence against pickets or MI5 on TV can only expect the state to react and seek a ban and those who seek to oppose such a ban are 'smart' and 'disingenuous'.

Of course the state will seek to ban that with which it disagrees, as it did over 'Real Lives' or indeed the refusal of the BBC to reshoot Jim Allen's plays including the award winning 'Days of Hope', but since when do marxists recognise such bans as merely something to be expected? We campaign against them precisely because the prevailing ideas in this society are anti-socialist and freedom of speech means our freedoms, those of the vast majority of people in this country. So too with *Perdition*.

Who was it who was campaigning for a ban if not the most reactionary sections of the political establishment? Lord Goodman in 'The Standard' (a paper well known for its anti-racism), the 'Independent', the 'Mail' and 'Sun', Martin Gilbert (biographer of Churchill) in the 'Telegraph' and a leader in the same paper (the *Telegraph* opposed to anti-Semitism!). Finally, in the 'Times', no less than Bernard Levin takes an identical position to that of O'Mahony: *Perdition* is anti-Semitic, but he defends its right to be staged. This is the same 'Times' which at present is defending Nazi war criminals on the run in Britain and accusing those who wish to see them hunted down at pursuing 'vendettas'.

Likewise the overwhelming majority of the media treats the Palestinians as terrorists and a problem. The Israeli state is still treated as the David of the Middle East, the Israeli state as democracy, and Zionist figures like Ben-Gurion with awe and respect. Films and documentaries deal with the Holocaust through



Waldemar Nowakowski:
Nazi and child.
Drawn in
Auschwitz,
1943

the prism of Zionist hindsight with the message being that a Jewish state would have prevented catastrophe.

Perdition ran contrary to all this which is why there was a massive Zionist campaign for it to be banned. This campaign included many non-Jewish Zionists, people like Conor Cruise O'Brien and other reactionaries, who would never lift a finger to fight racism but who were willing to speak out against *Perdition*.

The only time we would support a ban was if *Perdition* was a play attempting to incite racial hatred. It doesn't, O'Mahony knows it doesn't, as do its mainly Jewish cast and the many Jews — Holocaust survivors included — who support its being shown.

O'Mahony argues that *Perdition* argues that Zionism needed an extra million dead Jews in order to achieve statehood. It doesn't, indeed it says quite the opposite. What it does do is show the mixture of Zionist fatalism, opportunism, cynicism and 'realpolitik' that led the Zionist movement to obstruct the efforts of others to mount rescue campaigns at the critical time.

Comparisons of *Perdition* with stage-managed Moscow trials or blood-libel feudal-Christian anti-Semitism are absurd. Why not compare it with the trial on which

it is based, that of Kastner, where Kastner too failed to put up a defence? In making this absurd judgement, which the *Jewish Chronicle* immediately picked up on, O'Mahony fails to deal with the substantive material of the play. He doesn't ask what type of movement it is that obstructs rescue in the West by insisting on Palestine as the only destination for Jews, which concluded an economic transfer agreement with Nazi Germany, which sees a 'divine hand' in anti-Semitism even today, that separates out Jews from non-Jews in Israel today in just the same way as European anti-Semites sought to do with Jews.

The intemperate attack on *Perdition* can only give sustenance to those who seek to portray Zionism as some form of national liberation movement rather than a danger to Jews and Arabs alike.

Tony Greenstein

A reply

Tony Greenstein praises and justifies 'Perdition' by pointing to some of those who are against it. That's altogether too crude. Yet it is the normal

standard of judgment used by the two-camps left in world politics.

Here, as on everything else, the serious Marxist left needs an independent judgment. On a second reading, I think I was too soft on 'Perdition', much too soft.

The factual accuracy of Allen's account of Hungary has been contested on a number of important points. Here I will discuss what Allen makes of what he says are the facts.

A 'Hungarian Zionist leader', 'Yaron', has been accused of 'collaborating' with the Nazis in the mass murder of Hungary's Jews in 1944. He has brought a libel case against his accusers. Towards the end of the play Scott, counsel for Yaron's opponents, asks Yaron about a train on which, after negotiations between Jewish leaders and the Nazis, 1684 Jews escaped. How were the 1684 selected? Yaron says their first choice was to save the children.

Scott: *Why didn't you?*

Yaron: *Eichmann and Wisliceny refused. They thought that a children's transport might attract too much attention.*

Scott: *But 12 trains a day were already leaving for the killing centre at Auschwitz?*

Yaron: *It was their decision.*

Scott: *And so naturally you agreed...*

Yaron — the Jew, facing the mass murder of his community by the Nazis — is presented as a free and equal collaborator with the Nazi leaders.

Or take this exchange:

Scott: *In your earlier testimony you said that you were innocent of committing treason against your own people.*

Yaron: *Yes.*

Scott: *Liar! The evidence presented in this court has proved beyond any reasonable doubt that you... collaborated with the Nazis.*

Yaron: *We represented the best interests of our people.*

Scott: *By sending them to the gas chambers?*

Yaron (agitated): *I explain, but you won't listen!*

Scott: *The language is unequivocal: betrayal. There was a distinction between the needs of the Hungarian Jews and the dictates of Zionism, and let us not blur that distinction by all this talk about 'representing their best interests'. To save your own hides you practically led them to the gates of Auschwitz. You offered soothing assurances while the ovens were made ready, the transports organised, the deportation orders signed, and the lists already made up.*

Yaron: *I told you. Our Zionist tradition demanded...*

Scott: *Dogma before people!*

Yaron: *Not to save our hides.*

Scott: *Not from ignorance.*

Yaron: *No.*

Scott: *Mistakes?*

Yaron: *No.*

Scott: *From conviction then.*

(Pause) *Was it worth it? Was the purchase price of nearly one million Jews worth it?*

Yaron (as if reciting): *The crea-*

FORUM

tion of the Jewish state above all other considerations.

Scott: Coined in the blood and tears of Hungarian Jewry.

Yaron: We had to subordinate our feelings.

Scott (mockingly): The cruel criteria of Zionism!

Yaron: All deeds good or bad must be judged by the final outcome.

Scott: Now at last we are getting down to it.

Yaron: By the consequences... and by the historical aims they serve.

Scott: And Zionism is a political movement.

Yaron: Tied to God through its religious faith and sanctioned by the prophets whose ideas gave it birth.

Scott: But why wait 2000 years? If Zionism was only discovered in the late 19th century when Herzl appeared on the scene...

Judge: I do hope that we are not about to enter into a theological discussion, Mr Scott?

Scott (grins): Sorry. (Pause) Would you not agree that the more earthly demands of Zionism are reduced to territory, Dr Yaron? After all, that is what the six day war was all about, wasn't it? Expansion?

Yaron: Protection.

Scott: Morally justifiable of course? (Yaron offers a wintry smile). Given that 'the creation of the State of Israel stands above all other considerations', then from the materialistic Zionist point of view, was it morally right to betray the Jews of Hungary?

Yaron (snaps): Was it morally right to drop the bomb on Hiroshima?

Scott (unsure): No...

Yaron: Then kindly spare me your ethical fainting fits!

The hatred and loathing embodied in this passage, the dramatic climax of the play, is palpable, and I'm not sure it is just loathing of 'Zionism'.

Yaron is characterised as a sneaking, revengeful and vicious ex-victim who collaborated with his oppressors and helped them against his own people for reasons of an unreasoning, absolute, mystical commitment to 'Zionism'. The playwright allows Yaron to offer no real defence: Yaron's answers simply serve to build up the case against him by asserting that his actions are due to 'Zionism'.

There is even a Stalinist-type amalgam between Zionism and religion. In fact most of the Zionists in that period were atheists or not especially religious. This is one of many examples of the way that Allen's target broadens far beyond the present, or the wartime, Zionist movement, to Jews in general, or to his idea of Jews.

Despite all the histrionics, nothing remotely serious is ever said about how it all fits together — how the betrayal of Hungarian Jews (including lots of Hungarian Zionists) served the historical programme of Zionism. The play zig-zags between political assertions and explanations in terms of

personal self-serving by Yaron.

Yaron is allowed some spirited lines, for example accusing Britain and the USA of refusing to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz, to stop the death trains. But politically and intellectually — and it is a political argument or it is nothing — 'Perdition' never rises above the level of old-style Stalinist or Healyite stock-in-trade polemic. There is a lot more of the same sort of stuff.

Take another comment by Scott:

"They allowed themselves to become Eichmann's Trojan Horse, the Zionist knife in the Nazi fist. The simple, terrible truth is that the Jews of Hungary were murdered, not just by the force of German arms, but by the calculated [sic] treachery of their own Jewish leaders". All through the play Allen zig-zags between denouncing Zionists and Jews. The result is that they are more or less identical.

In the following sentence he lapses back to 'Zionists' to avoid open absurdity: "In terms of salvation, the only 'chosen people' left in Budapest were these Zionists". The use here of the term often favoured by anti-semites is, incidentally, quite representative of the play, which is full of Christian images in inappropriate places.

Or take — in detail — the judge's summing-up, which encapsulates the 'message' Allen wrote the play to convey.

The judge (i.e. Jim Allen) sums up the 'charge' against Yaron: "Miss Kaplan has accused Dr Yaron of collaboration with the Nazis, of fratricide, of helping in the destruction of his own people". The "accusation" has branded Yaron "with the mark of Cain".

How has the judge (Allen) understood the defence made by and for Yaron? "The defence has entered a plea of justification, which simply means an admission that the words defamatory of Dr Yaron... were true". The judge has 'understood' Yaron to say that "he cooperated with the Nazis, but he justifies this cooperation by saying that this was the only way that he and his colleagues could help their community".

'Perdition' makes its account of events in Hungary in 1944 serve for all the Nazi-controlled and surrounded Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe. Characters giving 'evidence' garrulously include details of the lives and behaviour of some of the strange satraps who ran the Judenrate (Jewish Councils) in Polish ghettos. All details and particularities are blurred and blended into one picture.

It may be legitimate dramatic technique to concentrate, distill, and focus material. But it works totally against registering the gradations of experience of the Jewish communities.

For 1944 Hungary, it can be argued in retrospect that refusal to comply with Nazi instructions would have saved more people in the end, though immediately it would have led to mass slaughter of unknowable proportions and scale. Even there, to explore 'bargains' made sense to people whose alternative was to give the signal for mass slaughter to com-

mence. The Jewish community was unarmed, facing the Nazis, and surrounded also by a considerable degree of Hungarian anti-semitism, though compared to the Nazis this traditional Catholic prejudice was almost benign. Jewish leaders hoped to play for time until the Russian army drove the Nazis from Hungary.

But in Hungary, we can say with hindsight that resistance might have saved many lives. No such thing can be said of the Jewish ghettos in Poland, who were surrounded by the Nazis: all resistance was met with immediate mass murder, whose potential scale at any moment would be unknown.

Yet this is how the judge sums up, supposedly dealing with Hungary but speaking at the end of a play in which Hungary and Poland and everywhere else in Eastern Europe have been indiscriminately mashed together.

The opponents of Yaron, says the judge (Allen), "argued that this was not cooperation but collaboration. That Eichmann needed the support of the Jewish leaders in order to hoodwink the Jews and make it easier for them to get them to participate in their own annihilation..."

The judge then picks out bits of the 'evidence' to summarise Allen's case — and he cites the Nazi decree giving the Jewish Council control over all Jews, as if it were the Jewish leaders' fault.

The Council allegedly distributed postcards from Auschwitz inmates written at gun-point, to reassure the Jews in Budapest. The judge discusses the train at length. Yaron's opponents had claimed "that the train was filled with privileged functionaries, young Zionists, and wealthy prominents, a fact which Dr Yaron himself did not contend. He... justified the selection by saying that had it been left to Eichmann, 'Palestine would have been flooded with cripples, old people, and socially worthless elements'."

The judge (Allen) continues: "We approach a most difficult and sensitive area, for we are dealing with what Dr Yaron describes as 'the cruel criteria of Zionism... the Zionist tradition that it is right to save the few out of the many'. Now this might appear as heartless"; adds the judge, a man of rigorous principle who believes in all or nothing, or maybe that you should not bother with a measly 1684 lives.

With that remark to show his good heart and clear head, the judge (Allen) then discusses the moral question. "Individuals are often praised for their heroism in war after performing deeds which at the time earned condemnation, yet which in the long term appear to have been noble and justified". The other way round, too, says this unusual judge, who is really the Trotskyist Jim Allen — citing the atom-bombing of Japan. He thinks maybe the Hague Convention will have to be "revised to accommodate new concepts of mass murder".

With that warm-up, the judge then says this:

"Looking at it from Dr Yaron's point of view, ruthless measures [i.e. he accepts the allegations in the play] must of

necessity accompany progressive aims, and the harsh doctrine of Zionism [sic — i.e., as defined by the 'ruthless measures', identified with and thereby made responsible for Yaron's 'collaboration'] is justified within the historical context of what was necessary to achieve a new Homeland in Palestine. 'When needs must the devil drives'. But here we are back on the shifting sands of morality, of the ends justifying the means, and I don't want to go into that".

But he will, and having asserted that collaboration with the Nazis to save 1684 and kill hundreds of thousands of Jews was a means to the end of achieving the Jewish homeland, he doesn't pause to ask himself how such means, in Hungary or anywhere in Eastern Europe, could possibly serve the ends of Zionism.

He continues, driving home the point to which all the philosophy is leading up. "Nevertheless, it can be argued that Israel exists today as a direct result of the actions of David Ben Gurion and men like Dr Yaron". He means 'actions' like 'collaborating' with the Nazis in killing Jews.

The stuff about necessary ruthlessness and singlemindedness in a progressive and noble cause is in fact tongue-in-cheek, for earlier in the play Israel today has been roundly condemned. The philosophising serves only as a bridge between the allegations against Yaron and the assertion that collaboration with the Nazis lies at the root of Israel — that there is a sort of world Jewish-Nazi conspiracy to replace the old Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy.

In a serious discussion or play, the judge would question and probe all the unproven assertions and unestablished links. Here, even his 'sympathy' for Yaron's side serves to condemn it.

The judge clinches the point, just to make sure you remember it, and works in human consideration and spurious sympathy to disarm resistance to his message. "It is a complex issue with different strands woven into the pitiless tapestry of war, genocide and the efforts of a group of individuals trying, against all odds" — and by deliberately betraying millions of their own people and helping the Nazis lead them to the slaughter! — "to build a nation, a haven for a people persecuted throughout history."

"If, on the evidence, you decide that Dr Yaron did collaborate" — then, of course, he is damned, and the state which arose "as a direct result of the actions of men like... Yaron" is, at the least, morally tainted. But Allen is engaged in a weaseling wrapping-up exercise, and the sentence switches direction in the middle, going from the vicious political slander to the hypocritical 'sympathy'. The sentence ends: "... then you must also take into consideration the circumstances. You must ask yourself how would the average man behave in that kind of situation? Would he have sacrificed his own life and the lives of his family?"

But hold on a minute! If Yaron is guilty of selfishly saving his own skin at the expense of others, what has that got to do

with 'the cruel criteria of Zionism'? Nothing. This passage is an example of the incoherence, and the slipping and sliding from one thing to another, that makes 'Perdition' a bad example even of what it wants to be (though it does help hypocritically to wrap up the poisoned politics).

After the judge makes a few more 'legal remarks', he sends the jury away, telling them to "consider your verdict", and the curtain falls. The pretence is that the audience is the jury. But really the judge has been the jury. And his verdict is plain and clear: the Zionists collaborated with the Nazis in order to help get Israel.

Like the judge's summing-up, the final speech by counsel for Yaron is really just part of the political indictment. Much of it is tongue-in-cheek rhetoric which really conveys, and is meant to convey, the opposite of what is said. This, for example:

"Mr Scott went to great lengths to prove that Dr Yaron acted as a representative of the Jewish Agency, and yet, as we have heard, Dr Yaron never denied this. Throughout his political life he has consistently identified the problem of the Jews with the need to establish a Jewish Homeland in Palestine, a

Jewish renaissance in the land of Israel. That was always his primary goal.

"But this of course raises problems for the defence which was never touched on. And with good reason, for if Dr Yaron acted as the official representative of the Jewish Agency in Palestine, then why single him out as a collaborator? Why not go the whole hog and accuse the entire Israeli cabinet of collaboration?"

Accuse the Israeli cabinet, not of doing vile things to the Arabs under its rule (though that is the sort of consideration that 'Perdition' appeals to), but of collaboration in the mass murder of Jews...? Absurd, yes, but one Israeli prime minister, Ben Gurion, is linked elsewhere with Yaron, as we have seen.

I have pointed out that Allen makes Hungary serve for all the Jewish ghettos, ignoring the different conditions in Warsaw after September 1939 and Budapest just after the Nazis seized Hungary in 1944. He has his characters tell horror stories about the Polish ghettos and the Judenrate there. Add to this the way that, when supposedly polemicising against Zionism, he often uses 'Zionist' and 'Jewish' interchangeably; and add the way

he zig-zags in explanation of Yaron's motives from desire to save himself to Zionist grand design — the fire is forever wobbling away from the Zionist alleged target to include more and more Jews.

The loathing and hatred he spews out targets not 'Zionists' but Jews. Does Allen mean to do that, or is the effect unintentionally produced by sloppiness and lack of control over his material? At first I thought the latter, but I'm not sure any more.

Certainly the 'balancing' remarks — which are there — and the conventional warning against a revival of fascism put into the mouth of Scott towards the end of the play, do not and cannot offset the anti-Jewish drift of the play, as Allen intends them to. The picture presented by Allen (like Brenner, and like the Stalinist inventors of the thesis of links and identification between the Nazis and Zionists) is, as I've already said, an inversion of the old Nazi idea of the 'Jewish-Bolshevik' world conspiracy. In Allen this is replaced by a sort of 'Jewish-Nazi' conspiracy, made to seem slightly less lunatic by being described as a 'Zionist-Nazi' conspiracy against the Jews, and backed up by examples of

Zionist-Nazi contact and of the 'collaboration' at gunpoint of the victims of Nazism with those who held the gun and annihilatingly superior force.

When they come to expound the 'Zionist-Nazi' conspiracy, both Allen and Brenner wind up clawing in the Jewish communities and outlining the lunatic picture of a conspiracy between the Nazis and the leaders of the six million they killed (though they killed the leaders, too). Their 'Zionist-Nazi' version breaks down because there wasn't a sharp division between Zionists and Jews. The Zionists were an organic part of the Jewish communities, not some intervening demons 'ex machina'. Allen's sloppy zig-zags are a mechanism for reconciling his political conscience — what he thinks he is doing, and why — with his rampant prejudices. Even if it is triggered by Israel's dealings with the Palestinian Arabs, the prejudice is retrospective and historically all-embracing; and 'Perdition' is awash with it.

John O'Mahony

At one point in the fictional socialist dialogue which makes up half of this pamphlet the character Mick declares, 'Let's go back to one of the greatest reference points in the history of Marxism — the Second Congress of the Communist International'.

He then goes on to note the debate there and the set of theses adopted on the national question, and asserts that this 'is one of the most profound and important documents of revolutionary Marxism'.

This is generally a correct estimation, with only one or two qualifications. One of them is to disagree with Radek during this debate when he said, 'It is the duty of the British Communists to go to the colonies and to fight at the head of the rising masses of the people.' While the intention of this statement was no doubt internationalist, the idea of British socialists speeding off to Ireland, India or wherever to place themselves 'at the head' of the rebellious natives does leave a rather chauvinist taste in the mouth. Far better, as Connolly said that, 'each nation should work out its own means of salvation', even if the working out of that salvation is accompanied by friendly discussions with those in the same class camp internationally.

So it is best to be wary of devoting great time and space, as this pamphlet does, to the British left telling the Irish how to wage their struggle. And it is best to be all the more wary of this particular discussion when the 'solution' suggested is as insubstantial and peripheral as the advocacy of some non-defined Protestant semi-autonomy within a future federal Ireland.

To make this a great dividing line as its chief advocate John O'Mahony does is, on the face of

Not an inch!

Geoff Bell, author of 'The Protestants of Ulster', etc. replies to Workers' Liberty no:5

it, rather absurd. Does he, or anyone else really imagine, for example, that if a million Protestant workers came to the IRA and said 'We agree with a 32-county Ireland, we agree with fighting the Brits, all we ask is that we discuss between us some form of Protestant Home Rule', that the IRA would show them the door?

But, of course, there is more to the matter than a suggestion of a future constitutional arrangement in a Brit-free Ireland. For this is only a peg upon which several shabby and threadbare garments are hung.

One of these is an analysis of contemporary Irish Republicanism. For O'Mahony Sinn Fein today is 'explicitly Catholic Republicanism' and 'Catholic nationalism'. Two pieces of 'evidence' are offered. One is a statement from Gerry Adams saying that in a 32 county Ireland the minority will have to abide by majority decisions. This is seen by O'Mahony as Sinn Fein wanting to coerce or 'conquer' the Protestants, others would see it as an uncontentious restatement of democratic principles.

The other reason given for Republicanism's present 'sectarianism' is the dropping six years ago of the advocacy of a federal Ireland by Sinn Fein. David O'Connell is quoted as saying this withdrew 'the hand of friendship to the Protestant people of Ireland', and from this the largely unsubstantiated conclusion is drawn that 'the Provisionals have now broken with Republicanism' adopting

'Catholic nationalism...the opposite of Tone's Republicanism'.

This is ahistoric nonsense. To put it at its kindest it is a half truth to say that 'Republicanism originated as the democratic left wing of the mainly Protestant aristocratic Irish nationalism of the late 18th century "patriot" movement' or that Tone Republicanism 'evolved' from Grattanism. In a sense this is true, just as it is an historical fact that Trotsky 'evolved' from Menshevism. But that tells us little about where either Trotsky or Tone ended up.

Tone's decisive break from Grattanism came because of his wish to form an alliance between the mass of the Catholic peasantry and that section of the Protestant bourgeoisie who identified themselves with the republicanism of Revolutionary France. The decisive difference between Tone and Grattan was Tone's willingness to submit himself to the demands and the democratic rule of Ireland's Catholic majority. He did not argue as David O'Connell did that there should be special treatment for the Protestant minority in a new Ireland; he did not adopt a 'federal solution' or demand semi-autonomy for the Protestants. And the reason he did not was precisely because he wanted to break religious divisions in Ireland rather than, as O'Mahony wants to do, erect state structures which solidify and perpetuate those divisions. To seek to adopt constitutional structures which divide Ireland on religious grounds is one thing. But, in doing so, to

claim the mantle of Tone is another and really rather breathtaking.

The re-writing of history is not confined to the eighteenth century. For, if the Republicans of today are not really Republicans then what is the character of the present battles in the North of Ireland? The answer is that 'The Republicans (real or fake?) superimposed themselves and their militarist strategy on a revolt which came from the social and political concerns of Catholics'. Now this is sailing very close to the imperialist wind — the idea that there were these poor uneducated downtrodden Catholics in the North who were suddenly taken over, led astray, terrorised or 'superimposed on' by the Godfathers of the IRA.

What really happened was rather different. The demands for civil rights, for equality with Protestants, which the Catholic community and others made in the late 1960s were rejected out of hand by the Unionists and, in the final analysis, albeit at times reluctantly, by the British as well. It was this refusal to 'reform' the Northern state, it was the very failure of the civil rights campaign, it was the pogroms of 1969 and events like Bloody Sunday which produced the Provisionals from within the very Catholic community O'Mahony says they 'superimposed' themselves on.

O'Mahony finds it difficult to accept that because it means accepting in turn conclusions about loyalism, as the political creed of the majority of Protestants, which would raise rather awkward questions about his autonomy proposals — not that those proposals are ever detailed by him. But, for instance, would they include majority control of allocation of council houses? Would they include control of education, of council employment? Of the local police? If they would not, then the

FORUM

autonomy wouldn't amount to very much. If they would, then how are we to be sure that what happened before in terms of anti-Catholic discrimination wouldn't happen again?

This is a very practical question, and a rather obvious one. It is a pity the pamphlet refuses to go into this and prefers instead to give over half of its pages to erecting straw arguments in a fictionalised discussion, in which the O'Mahony supporters come over as clever, serious and good socialists and the others come over as simpletons and sloganizers. The caricaturing is so over the top that it is not even good fiction.

But the fiction is not confined to this section. The substantial argument that is advanced is that the semi-autonomy for Protestants is the only alternative to seeking to smash the Protestants, drive them into the sea or subject them to Catholic nationalism.

Sad to say, the error being made here is that made only too often by bourgeois commentators

— to see the North of Ireland conflict in religious terms. No, Republicanism does not want to smash Protestantism or drive Protestantism into the sea. What it does want to do is smash Unionism and Loyalism. It also wants to smash British imperialism and the Free Statism of the rich and powerful in the 26 counties.

All these are very worthy endeavours, but the reason in particular socialists seek the destruction of Unionism and Loyalism is because its strength has come from its conscious policy of seeking to divide the working class of Ireland, and of the North of Ireland. As a consequence it has reduced the Protestant working class to what James Connolly called 'slaves in spirit because they have been reared up among a people whose conditions of servitude were more slavish than their own'.

Accordingly, no concession to the politics and practice of Unionism/Loyalism can be sanctioned.

In the event of an unconditional British withdrawal does this mean, as the British media and O'Mahony tells us that there will be 'a civil war, involving big forced population movements and

mutual slaughter'? Well, without going into the blood bath discussion yet again, it is now fairly obvious, given the current disarray within Unionism, that the Protestant community has neither the confidence, enthusiasm nor singleness of purpose to indulge in the mass slaughter which has been so often predicted.

Since 1968 Unionism has been divided. It can say 'no' with one voice but it cannot agree on its 'solution' to the 'troubles'. It always has been a gross insult to the Protestant community to say that hundreds of thousands of them are just waiting for the chance to wipe out all the Fenians they can; but it is even crazier still to say they would do so for purely sectarian reasons. Like all communities, the Protestant one in the North of Ireland needs something positive to fight for, and because they are split on this they are all the more weakened. As the old Orange slogan puts it 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall', and a political strategy which seeks to exploit the divisions within Unionism weakens it to the point of collapse.

One further point must be made. It is claimed in the pamphlet that its advocacy of some sort of Home Rule for Pro-

testants has not stopped Socialist Organiser from siding with Irish Republicanism against the British state, or dampened its enthusiasm for demanding British withdrawal from Ireland. This was not evident at the recent AGM of the Labour Committee on Ireland when SO supporters distinguished themselves by two interventions.

One was to argue against a conference motion calling for the disbandment of the murderously sectarian Ulster Defence Regiment — a 'discussion' on this was proposed instead.

The other was to disagree with the view that members of the Orange Order should be banned from membership of the Labour Party. The Orange Order, said one SO supporter, was nothing but 'a social club'.

It is not worth a single sentence to answer this reactionary rubbish. Far better to ask comrades, is this where your 'rights for Protestants' takes you? — defence of the Protestant terror of the UDR? The right for the bigotry of the Orange Order to be given a voice in the Labour Party?

Well comrades, if that is the road you wish other socialists or Irish Republicans to travel then the answer must surely be — not an inch.

AGAINST THE STREAM

Any attempt at dialogue, discussion or international left regroupment should be welcomed. For this reason, the call for an open conference of Trotskyist groups put out by the British Workers' Revolutionary Party attracted interest on the left.

But it was all a con. The conference is not to be open at all. It will be no more than an international fusion conference of the WRP, the Moreno Group (the Liga Internacional de los Trabajadores, LIT), based in Latin America, especially Argentina, and the very tiny splinter of the Lambertist organisation led by the Hungarian Michel Varga. There will be a grand fusion and the declaration of yet another spurious and probably unstable 'Fourth International'.

This is a shame, though not at all surprising. For a transition period after it expelled its old caudillo Gerry Healy, the WRP seemed as if it might be opening itself up to arguments and was prepared to reexamine its own sorry history. It was a bit like the Communist Party in the mid-'50s when Stalin was denounced by his successor Khrushchev. That period is now over. The rump WRP has fallen under the ideological tutelage of the LIT — one of the largest and also one of the most miserable would-be 'Trotskyist' groups.

The LIT, whose main base is in Latin America (but hitherto have had no presence at all in Britain), is the tendency until recently fronted by Nahuel Moreno. Moreno died earlier this year, and it remains to be seen if the LIT can survive him. Under his leadership, especially in Argentina, the LIT built substantial support. The Argentine Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) seems to have quite widespread

Kitsch-Trots tango

By John Alloway

support among militant sections of the Argentinian working class.

Politically the LIT expresses just about all the defects of post-Trotsky 'Trotskyism' — although often more crassly than its competitors. Until 1979, Moreno was part of the Mandel-led 'United Secretariat' (although generally aligned to the rightward-moving American SWP). Moreno finally broke with the USec over the Nicaraguan revolution, and had a short-lived link-up with the 'Lambertist' current based in France. Their fusion soon fell apart, and the LIT was formed.

Ultra-orthodox Trotskyists on many questions today, in fact the Morenists have been among the most opportunist tendencies. In the 1950s, the Morenist paper 'Palabra Socialista' declared itself 'Organ of Revolutionary Workers' Peronism — Under the discipline of General Peron and the Peronist High Command'.

In the 1960s, they embraced first Castroism ('today (the Castroite) OLAS (Organisation of Latin American States)... is the only vehicle for power'), and then Maoism.

The LIT are probably the most populist tendency claiming to be Trotskyist in the world. For example, when Argentina and Britain went to war in 1982, the LIT called for 'national unity' of Argentines, and for the unions to open recruiting offices for the army.

In 1984, looking back, the LIT commented that if British imperialism had been defeated: "it would have unleashed a huge wave of anti-imperialism in the area." In a marvellous case of

heads I win, tails you lose, they add: "The defeat of Argentina, nevertheless, resulted in the advance of the revolution in the Southern Cone."

Classless, meaningless and contentless ideas of 'the revolution' and 'the counter-revolution' dominate LIT material. (In Central America, 'the revolution' is petty bourgeois; in the Southern Cone, the same 'revolution' is proletarian...). And the revolution is generally the most militant and vehement petty bourgeois nationalism.

On Ireland, they call for driving the Protestants (and the Dublin government, 'the worst Loyalists') into the sea. On the Iran-Iraq war, they say the two countries should stop fighting each other and instead unite to crush the 'fascist enclave' of Israel.

Generally, though, the LIT's trouble is not so much awful positions as grotesque ignorance of whatever it is they are talking about. Their slogan for South Africa, for example, is: 'a government of the ANC, the PAC, Azapo and the independent unions' — which if it means anything at all (other than chaos) is a call for a bourgeois government.

They have also called for 'self-determination for all races' (?) and the right of all tribes to representation in the government. So much for the demand of the workers' movement for an undivided non-racial South Africa. (No doubt we can expect an 'anti-imperialist united front' on these questions with Buthelezi — or even, given South Africa's massive foreign debt, Botha himself).

In any rational discussion among revolutionaries, the LIT would be washed down the plug hole. It is a sad comment on the would-be Trotskyist movement that they seem to be able to dominate this latest 'regroupment'.

Note by the editor: At the LCI AGM the issue was the call to disband the UDR implied more British troops (in order to carry it out), and therefore contradicted 'Troops Out'. SO supporters were not 'against' disbanding the sectarian forces.

Some of the best militant miners in the Scottish coalfield are members of Orange lodges. This shows that the issue is more complex than the simple-minded approach 'Green good, Orange bad' takes account of. Geoff Bell will be replied to in the next issue.

INLA feud

from page 19

acid of an eclectic brew of bits of Marxism and various Third World ideologies. The smaller groups inevitably lack a powerful and stable centre, and can therefore easily come to provide a flag of convenience for 'wild men', oddballs, or plain self-serving gangsters.

The extent to which 'armed struggle' degenerates into gangsterism varies according to the degree to which the movement is involved in real struggle, its tradition, its base, and the strength of its central apparatus to impose a political objective. Nevertheless, the choice has to be made by socialists — self-liberating working-class mass action or military elitism.

Some honest and sincere IRSP militants say they will continue to try to build a revolutionary working-class party. No, they won't — not unless they face the fact that the entire 'armed struggle now' eclectic revolutionary culture in which the INLA/IRSP has been embedded is the opposite of serious working-class politics. Working-class politics ends with armed struggle. It does not begin with it. The lesson of the latest murderous bloodletting among the INLA is that you cannot build a revolutionary socialist party as a political adjunct to a military formation ●